

## Ensuring Americans Have Access to Clean, Safe Drinking Water

More than 8,000 children in Flint, Michigan, have been exposed to water contaminated by lead and other chemicals because of a decision by officials to change the source of the city's drinking water. Aging pipes leached lead into the city's tap water, poisoning residents and likely leading to chronic, irreversible health problems for thousands of young children there.

Lead levels in drinking water are a continuing threat, not just in Flint, but in communities across the country. Many U.S. cities rely on water pipes that are more than a century old, on average. Every year, there are some 240,000 water main breaks in America, resulting in a loss of about 7 billion gallons of clean drinking water a day—which represents about 12 percent of treated water. This wastes energy, water, and disrupts businesses and communities. Investment in our nation's water infrastructure is critical to public health, economy and quality of life. It will create thousands of jobs replacing and upgrading water pipes, treatment plants, storage tanks, and installing more sustainable and resilient water systems. These solutions require long-term commitment at all levels of governance, and the urgency of the Flint crisis warrants prompt action.



The BlueGreen Alliance unites 15 of America's largest labor unions and environmental organizations. It identifies ways today's environmental challenges can create and maintain quality jobs and build a thriving and fair economy.

To resolve the Flint emergency—and the larger crisis facing America's water infrastructure—we recommend:

**Direct Funding to Fix the Flint Crisis:** Flint needs immediate emergency funding to restore water quality, initiate corrosion control, repair and replace water mains and service lines, and upgrade water pipelines and treatment systems to ensure its water supply is and remains safe. Highly qualified, trained, and dedicated American workers manufacture, and stand ready to install, the safest and highest quality products for these badly needed upgrades.

**Transparency and Accountability:** Recently in Congress, bi-partisan legislation introduced by Michigan Representatives Dan Kildee and Fred Upton—H.R. 4470, the Improving Notification for Clean and Safe Drinking Water Act of 2016—passed overwhelmingly. This bill improves EPA accountability for water lead levels/lead testing and public notification, and the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee is rightfully considering similar legislation.

**Update Safety Regulations:** The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency must act immediately to update the Lead and Copper Rule (LCR), specifically to:

- Require water utilities to develop a comprehensive full LSL replacement program, prioritizing communities and facilities (i.e. hospitals, schools, child care) where lead issues have been identified; Improve lead monitoring to ensure that all lead likely to reach consumers is detected, that high risk homes are truly targeted, and that practices used to minimize detection of lead during monitoring are prohibited;
- Implement a comprehensive culturally-appropriate public education program on lead exposure and the risk posed by LSLs, with an emphasis on households/businesses where LSLs have been identified and vulnerable populations (i.e. families with young children, low income households) and guidance on remediation; and
- Increase transparency and effective public access regarding LCR compliance, lead sampling results, and identification of LSL and lead-water level prevalence.

### **Increase Funding and Shore Up Funding**

**Mechanisms:** Water infrastructure has been chronically underfunded. We need to strengthen current policies and programs to maintain and modernize America's aging and vulnerable drinking and clean water systems—for instance State Revolving Funds (SRFs) and the Water Infrastructure Finance Innovation Act (WIFIA).

We also need to support innovative community, state, and federal initiatives (to include grant/loan programs, infrastructure banks/trusts, and expanding private investment) to increase funding, transparency, and accountability for

upgrading water infrastructure. More robustly funded SRFs and WIFIA may have a viable path in the reauthorization of the Water Resources Reform and Development Act (WRRDA) expected in 2016.

**Conclusion:** We need leadership to confront and correct these failures. The BlueGreen Alliance stands united in holding elected leaders and policymakers accountable for their actions regarding this crisis, and ensuring Americans have the 21st Century infrastructure they deserve.



The BlueGreen Alliance is a national partnership of America's largest labor unions and environmental organizations. We work together to turn today's biggest environmental challenges into our biggest economic and job-creating opportunities. Together with 15 million members and supporters, we are a powerful, unified voice calling for good, family-sustaining jobs, a clean environment, and a thriving and fair American economy.

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